

Preliminary Abstract

CULTURAL CHECKS ON BIRTH CONTROL USE IN PUERTO RICO

Significant changes in Puerto Rico's economy over the past two decades have not been accompanied by much change in fertility, leaving the Island one of the fastest growing political units in the world. The present paper explores some of the attitudes prevalent in Puerto Rican culture which obstruct the widespread utilization of birth control methods.

Birth control use depends upon at least four factors: (1) motivation for family limitation; (2) awareness of means for achieving family limitation; (3) availability of the means; (4) acceptance of the means.

I. Motivation: In general Puerto Ricans see the small family as an ideal. However, acceptance of the ideal as a personal goal may be impeded by:

- A. The presence of institutionalized releases from excessive fertility such as child dispersal and desertion.
- B. A relative lack of rewards for the small family.
- C. Tardy awareness of the disadvantages of children in a culture where planfulness and active mastery of the world is not greatly emphasized.
- D. The failure of husband and wife to communicate small family ideals to one another.
- E. Conceptions of the advantages of a large family. For example:
  - 1. Children as an index of virility.
  - 2. Children as security for one's old age.
  - 3. Children as a means to tie down the spouse in a non-legal marriage.

II. Knowledge: Knowledge of modern birth control methods is probably greater than in most underdeveloped countries because of a birth control program which has received considerable attention by mass media. However, knowledge is still below an optimum level due partly to:

- A. Modesty tabus and the insulation of women.
- B. Lack of motivation for knowledge seeking on the part of husbands.
- C. Lack of communication between husbands and wives.

III. Availability: Free materials are available to all classes in the population, but a combination of defects in the birth control program and certain attitudes of the population make their acquisition somewhat difficult.

IV. Resistances: Resistance to birth control is based less on religion than on superstition, fears of promoting infidelity, and interference with pleasure. However, these objections, given relatively low motivation, appear sufficient to keep many from effective birth control use.

Conclusion: Continuing research on larger groups in the population should throw more light on the validity of the hypotheses above, which are based on an intensive study of 72 Puerto Rican families. Tentatively, motivation does not at present appear to be of sufficient intensity to overcome deficiencies in knowledge, problems of supply, and prejudices against birth control methods. On the other hand, it would appear that small family ideals are sufficiently widespread so that increments in knowledge of contraceptives, improvements in their distribution, and the development of simpler birth control methods would precipitate a rapid decline in Puerto Rican fertility.

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